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DISPUTE HAMPERS NICARAGUA REBELS

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Special to The New York Times

TEGUCIGALPA, Honduras, Nov. 3 — The leaders of the main Nicaraguan anti-Government rebel alliance are divided by politically damaging disagreements over the objectives and tactics of the rebel movement, according to rebel and American officials as well as Congressional sources.

Their dispute appears to have blunted the appeal of the rebels, who are grouped under the newly formed United Nicaraguan Opposition, known by its Spanish acronym of UNO.

Despite new civilian directors, renewed American financing and advice from the Central Intelligence Agency, the guerrillas have not begun to make the political impact inside Nicaragua or abroad that rebel and American officials say they had hoped for.

UNO leaders have been unable to agree on a coordinated political and military strategy and have failed to attract active support from more than a minority of the tens of thousands of Nicaraguans who have fled Nicaragua to Costa Rica, Honduras and the United States, rebel and American officials say.

"It's been a wash so far," Representative Dave McCurdy, Democrat of Oklahoma, said in a telephone interview. "They haven't gotten their act together. They aren't gaining momentum."

Mr. McCurdy is a member of the House Intelligence Commitee, which monitors the guerrilla movement. He strongly supported renewed financial aid to the rebels. An American official who monitors the rebels said he was becoming pessimistic about their chances in the absence of a political program capable of attracting greater support.

"If they don't get together, we could face a prolonged Bay of Pigs," he said.

Directors Differ on Aims

The rebels' difficulties appear to be partly inevitable as the Reagan Administration tries to transform a purely military rebel army originally trained and financed three years ago by the Central Intelligence Agency and Argentina into a broader-based opposition movement with a well-defined political program.

But the obstacles have proved greater than expected, according to rebel and American officials as well as Congressional sources who were interviewed in Costa Rica, Honduras, Miami and Washington in recent weeks.

The three directors of the United Nicaraguan Opposition, Adolfo Calero, Arturo Cruz and Alfonso Robelo, were brought together by the Administration in March in a successful effort to persuade Congress to back an apparently more unified rebel alliance. It was the second time that the Administration had sought new civilian leaders to raise the rebels' political appeal.

But in the last six months the three newly appointed directors have been unable to agree on how the organization should be structured and on who should be appointed to key positions, both rebel and American officials say. They have also argued over how to punish human rights abuses and over what specific political objectives the rebels are fighting for, the same sources said.

Rights Abuses Are Issue

The directors particularly disagree over whether the rebels' goal is to overthrow the Sandinistas or only to force the Sandinistas to negotiate, a number of rebel officials said.

Mr. Cruz and Mr. Robelo have demanded a genuinely independent human rights commission able to punish rebel troops, according to rebel and Congressional sources. The two directors have also argued that the rebels should be ready to negotiate with the Sandinistas and should prepare specific proposals to be discussed, the same sources said.

Rebel officials blame the Reagan Administration for some of their problems. A senior UNO official said the rebels were $500,000 in debt because the Administration had delayed in delivering $27 million in nonlethal aid approved by Congress to pay for medicine, clothes and food.

Rebel officials also complain of receiving conflicting signals from the Central Intelligence Agency, the National Security Council, the State Department and the White House.

"The Administration doesn't know what its policy is," a senior rebel official said. "It has not decided if it wants to overthrow the Sandinistas or if it wants to negotiate with them."

Behind the Disputes

Some of the disputes between the UNO leaders seem to reflect a simple power struggle, with each of the three directors trying to appoint people loyal to him to top positions. Other differences appear more ideological.

Mr. Cruz and Mr. Robelo appear to represent the more liberal wing of the rebel opposition. Both are former senior Sandinista officials who actively supported the Sandinistas in their struggle to overthrow Anastasio Somoza Debayle, the Nicaraguan dictator, and whose supporters include a number of disaffected former Sandinistas. Mr. Calero is a former businessman who appears to represent the conservative wing of the rebel opposition.

Most of the troops in his guerrilla army are conservative, Roman Catholic peasants from northern Nicaragua dedicated to overthrowing the Sandinistas. Many, though by no means all, of Mr. Calero's aides and important backers were sympathetic to Mr. Somoza and the Nicaraguan National Guard. Some are former National Guard officers.

Disagreements between the three UNO directors have been made more acute because Mr. Calero is also the head of the Nicaraguan Democratic Force, the largest and most effective guerrilla army. The position has allowed Mr. Calero to forge close ties with the White House and the C.I.A. As a consequence, Mr. Cruz and Mr. Robelo feel literally outgunned by Mr. Calero and at times have thought that when they argue with Mr. Calero they are also arguing with the C.I.A., according to three different rebel officials.

'UNO Will Not Dissolve'

Mr. Cruz and Mr. Robelo have no regular contact with top military commanders in Mr. Calero's rebel army, the officials said.

"There is no sense among the military commanders of what the UNO stands for," a senior UNO official said.

A Congressional source who monitors the rebel movement said that in some key debates the C.I.A. has entered the discussion and backed Mr. Calero against Mr. Cruz and Mr. Robelo. At other times, however, the C.I.A. has sided with Mr. Cruz and Mr. Robelo, the source said.

In an interview here, Mr. Calero denied that there had been significant disputes within the UNO leadership. He said enemies of the rebels were trying to create discord with damaging rumors.

"We are an alliance and naturally there are differences," Mr. Calero said. "But the UNO will not dissolve. In fact, it will become stronger."

However, Congressional and rebel sources said in interviews that the disputes had been strong enough for Mr. Cruz to consider resigning two months ago, an option, they said, that he still may choose.

'I'm Not Ready to Quit'

Mr. Cruz refused to say in an interview if he had almost resigned, adding that he intended to stay in the UNO. "We have an obligation to continue working to create an effective UNO," Mr. Cruz said. "It's very difficult, but I'm not ready to quit."

Mr. Robelo could not be reached for comment, despite repeated telephone calls to his office. A Western official said that the rebels also had practical difficulties and that in particular they needed to create a more rational logistical system.

At present most supplies for the Nicaraguan Democratic Force army are handled by Mr. Calero and by Mr. Calero's brother and brother-in-law, the official said. He added that the C.I.A. had said "the existing structure should not be changed" in order not to demoralize Mr. Calero's supporters. Mr. Calero defended his organization, saying that it had proved itself over three years to be the only rebel force capable of attracting enough support to mount a sustained campaign against the Sandinistas.

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